**The Skinny on Being Thin: A French Paradox**

<http://winefolly.com/update/french-paradox-diet/>

**The French Paradox** is the contradiction between scientific theory and real world facts. In 1991, in a 60 Minutes segment entitled “The French Paradox”, French researcher Serge Renaud, Ph.D. roiled the U.S. government by stating his research findings. Namely, by U.S. standards, the French do everything wrong in terms of health: they eat a high-fat diet, they don’t jog and they smoke, yet they have half the rate of heart disease (143 vs. 315 per 100,000 middle-aged men) and live 2.5 years longer. He said it was due to higher levels of red wine consumption in France – at the time 16 gallons per person per year vs. 2 gal/person/yr. The program catalyzed a 40% increase in North American demand for red wines. No better theory has been advanced in the ensuing 22 years.

## *Why Does The French Paradox Work?*

## Despite regularly eating rich foods like pastries, cheeses and cream sauces, France has a remarkably low obesity rate and this has mostly to do with their eating style. Unlike North Americans who tend to shovel down processed foods as if eating were a race, the French eat leisurely. And because wine and conversation play essential roles in their social ritual, getting a little tipsy on a bottle of Bordeaux actually helps digestion by slowing things down.

They spend more time during the day with food as a focus than do Americans (Kahneman et al., 2010). These findings indicate that there are certain cultural values and practices that allow the French to separate food and the pleasure of eating from the drive to be slim.

**Red wine may play a role as well.** According to research from Purdue University (Kim 2012), red wine can help keep the pounds off. Scientists there identified a substance in red wine called piceatannol which inhibits the formation of new fat cells and prevents them from developing into mature fat cells. The compound blocks insulin’s ability to store fat. In other studies, researchers found that moderate wine drinkers show the lowest accumulation of abdominal fat among all drinkers.

### French portions are smaller than American portions.

There is direct evidence in the abundance–moderation contrast of the American and French eating environments. French portion sizes are notably smaller than American portion sizes (Rozin et al., 2003). Part of the “French Paradox” can be explained by the fact that the French eat less than Americans. French portion sizes are smaller in comparable restaurants, in the sizes of individual portions of foods in supermarkets, in portions specified in cookbooks and in the prominence of “all you can eat” restaurants in American dining guides and the idea that one should stuff oneself on the national holiday, Thanksgiving.

### The French cook more than the Americans.

The main difference in grocery stores is that the frozen sections in American stores are much bigger than in France: The market for prepared food is simply not as big in France. Furthermore, TV dinners are a concept mostly unknown to the French culture. The French, in general, tend to put more thought and time into their meals. French people shop on a daily basis and decide what to eat based on what looks good at the market.

### When the French drink, they take their time and they drink wine.

In France, wine and food go together like a baguette and a chunk of brie. In other words, the French drink wine with most meals and actually think of it as “food.”

### French drink a lot of water instead of sodas.

The French are very fond of mineral water (not caloric sodas and smoothies) and one can find many different types in the stores.